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Ex-CIA chief favors nuclear arms freeze

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From Wire Services

Washington—Former CIA Director William E. Colby yesterday endorsed the idea of a Soviet-American nuclear weapons freeze, saying either a freeze or an arms limitation agreement "is adequately verifiable for the safety of the country, and the chance of violation is minimal."

"The chance of injury to the country is minimal, and the advantage to our country and the advantage to the Soviets of reducing the numbers of and the ingenuity of these new devices which are progressively more dangerous is well worth that minimal chance of violation of a minimal degree," he said.

In fact, he said, any nuclear arms accord with Moscow would make it "easier rather than harder" to keep tabs on what the Soviets are doing by empowering the United States to demand an explanation of any suspicious Soviet arms behavior.

Mr. Colby, who headed the CIA from 1973 to 1976, made his remarks at a press breakfast organized by the nuclear freeze movement.

He said normal CIA intelligence checks on Soviet compliance—through satellite photography, electronic eavesdropping and analysis of observable Soviet activities and publications—would come into play. In addition, he said, the Soviets would

have to consider whether some Soviet official knowledgeable about the cheating would reveal it.

He said the Soviets could surreptitiously violate an agreement to freeze the production, deployment or testing of new nuclear weapons for a while, but not for long enough to endanger America's security to any significant degree.

"It is conceivable they can go into one of those salt mines and produce something and hammer it out all very quietly and secretly, and nobody will be able to see it or know about it," he said. "But the question has to be asked, can they do that in a way that has any strategic significance? And there I think the answer is basically no."

His position on verification differs from the Reagan administration's. In April, a State Department policy statement said:

"A freeze on all testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons would include important elements that cannot be verified. The practical result is that the United States would live up to a freeze in all its aspects, while there would be considerable doubt that the Soviets would also live up to it. We simply cannot afford to base our national security on trust of the Soviets."

Mr. Colby said that although no sane American or Russian leader would use nuclear weapons in a first strike, "we have the problem of insane men getting ahold of them—that's why we have to reduce them."

He endorsed President Reagan's proposal for deep mutual cuts in nuclear warheads through a strategic arms reduction treaty.

The assumption that war can be forever deterred by the fear of mutual annihilation "is becoming more and more tenuous as a logical basis for living," Mr. Colby said.

He also called for a treaty that would establish a joint "war room" staffed by American and Russian officers as a means of preventing an accidental nuclear war.

"We have got to improve our crisis communications," he said, adding that with the two superpowers deploying increasingly accurate missiles, a nuclear crisis "can take place in a matter of hours and even shorter."